

The arrival of the parasitoid is probably of greatest benefit to plant nurseries that grow *Eucalyptus* spp. from seed or import small plants to grow on for the production of ornamental plants to sell to the public and to gardeners during the first few years until young plants are well established. Mature trees are known to be less susceptible to damage by the psyllid and have probably benefited only marginally from the arrival of the parasitoid.

Acknowledgements

The infestation of the eucalyptus psyllid in the Wild Life Park was drawn to my attention by my son, Philip Bennett. Assistance in locating literature and references was provided by R. Nguyen, S. M. Crellin, J. P. O'Connor and Rebecca Murphy. I am grateful to John S. Noyes for identifying the parasitoid *Psyllaephagus pilosus* and for providing relevant background information and to Jon H. Martin for permission to quote his record of *Ctenarytaina eucalypti* for the Isle of Man.

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Rannoch Sprawler *Brachionycha nubeculosa* (Esp.) (Lep.: Noctuidae) sitting in full sun

Those who still search for resting moths by day know that the shady side is the most profitable place to look. As South (1907, *The Moths of the British Isles*) advises, few moths will be found sitting in full sun. Some of the early spring Scottish specialities, however, appear to be exceptions. In such latitudes the sun is weak at this time of the year, so both day and night temperatures are usually low. Overheating is unlikely to be a problem. On the contrary, basking might actually help a moth's metabolism.

In the days before portable mercury vapour light traps, the Rannoch Sprawler *Brachionycha nubeculosa* was traditionally found by searching for the

well-camouflaged adults on old birch trunks in its few known haunts. This is a very time-consuming method. Despite much perseverance in the Aviemore area, I failed miserably in many hours of trying spread over several springs. What few moths I saw were shown to me by colleagues. Ironically, after checking many thousands of birches in vain, I finally found two moths for myself – on the same trunk! Photographing them was not easy because of the light – they were sitting on the south-western side of the trunk in the full glare of the late afternoon sun.

Later, it occurred to me that every one of the eight or so Rannoch Sprawlers I had seen was facing a similar direction – between south and west, in mid to late afternoon. Perhaps this explained my lack of success. I had always concentrated on the shaded north side of the trunks, barely glancing at the sunny side. Even so, it never occurred to me that the Rannoch Sprawler might deliberately choose to sit in the sun. I assumed the moths' aspect was due to chance, or that the trunk had been in shade when the moths settled there at dawn.

Having obtained eggs, I reared the caterpillars with little difficulty, once realising that they preferred small triangular leaves from the oldest birches rather than larger and more luscious ones from younger trees. As frequently happens with this species, only one of my 20 pupae produced a moth the following spring, the others carrying over. In late morning I placed the moth (a male) on the partly shaded eastern side of a birch trunk to photograph it, then left it there. Over the course of the day, the moth moved sideways on the trunk four times, always so as to expose itself to the direct rays of the sun. By evening it was facing due west, having moved at least 180 degrees round the trunk.

During the next two springs the remaining moths emerged, usually before noon. Sometimes I was able to watch them expanding and drying their wings on a cut section of birch trunk placed on a sunny windowsill. Invariably, they did so in full direct sunlight, or where they would receive the highest level of insolation when the sky was overcast. So precise was their orientation that, if two moths emerged close together, one would often interfere with the other by climbing the trunk on exactly the same line. Having dried their wings, they continued to sit in full sunlight throughout the day.

Finally, seven of the moths (four males and three females) were released on local birch trunks in late March, where most remained for several days during a spell of cold, windy and showery weather. The moths regularly changed their positions and even moved between trees, but when checked by day they were always on the sunny south side of a trunk. They gradually climbed higher, until after six days one female was 3m above the ground. All three females were then taken back to Speyside and released within the known range of the species.

Such consistent evidence from both wild and bred moths strongly suggests that sunning is a deliberate strategy of the Rannoch Sprawler, and that observers who wish to find this species by the traditional method should tailor their search accordingly. Other spring species that may also sun themselves include Small Dark Yellow Underwing *Anarta cordigera* and perhaps Rannoch Brindled Beauty *Lycia lapponaria*.

Ford (*loc. cit.*) introduces the pale grey Aviemore 'race' of the Rannoch Sprawler, contrasting it with the much darker Rannoch form. In practice, the differences are not so clear-cut. The moths reared from my Aviemore female were strikingly variable, some being at least as pale as Ford's illustration of this race yet others quite as dark as his Rannoch example. Presumably Aviemore examples average lighter on the whole, but pale grey ones seem to be the exception not the rule.— ROY LEVERTON, Whitewells, Ordiquhill, Cornhill, Banffshire AB45 2HS.

A new county record: a Silky Wainscot *Chilodes maritimus* Tausch. (Lep.: Noctuidae) in Cardiganshire (Ceredigion)

A single specimen was caught in a Rothamsted Insect Survey light-trap at Aberystwyth (trap No. 585, O.S. Grid Ref.: SN 629836) on the night of 2/3 June 2004.

Chilodes maritimus is a locally common species, inhabiting large reed-beds in southern and eastern England. It is also found on the Gower peninsula; this being the closest known breeding locality to the trap site. The specimen was caught at the beginning of the species' flight period and it is well known that when moths migrate, they generally do so in the first few nights after emergence. Recent work by Dr Jason Chapman, of the Rothamsted Radar Entomology Unit, has shown that even weak-flying moths (such as *C. maritimus*) can travel several hundred kilometres in just one night, using fast-moving high-altitude winds. Therefore it is quite possible that this individual could have arrived in Aberystwyth from the Gower population.

My thanks to Ian Tillotson for his consistent hard work in identifying the catches from the Aberystwyth trap (amongst others) and for informing me of this record. Thanks also to Mike Leggett for operating the trap at Aberystwyth; and to Jason Chapman for the information above.— PHILIP J L GOULD, Co-ordinator, Light-trap Network, Rothamsted Insect Survey, Plant & Invertebrate Ecology Division, Rothamsted Research, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 2JQ (E-mail: phil.gould@bbsrc.ac.uk).

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